

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 1407

By Brown

A RESOLUTION to honor and commend the Buffalo soldiers of the 1st Battalion 24th Infantry Regimental Combat Team, the renowned Deuce Four, on the celebration of its 22nd annual reunion and commemoration of its 139th anniversary.

WHEREAS, our Nation was conceived by individuals who were willing to sacrifice their personal safety and concerns to ensure our individual and collective freedom, and Tennessee is especially proud to be the home of so many valiant men and women who have performed above and beyond the call of duty; and

WHEREAS, such individuals comprise the membership of one unit in particular of the United States Army, possessed of a long, proud history of unflinching and unfailing service to these United States; that unit is the 1st Battalion 24th Infantry Regimental Combat Team (RCT), known colloquially as the Buffalo Soldiers or Deuce Four, and it will be celebrating its 139th anniversary and 22nd annual reunion on July 9-13, 2008, in Chattanooga; and

WHEREAS, the 24th Infantry Regiment was organized with African-American enlisted personnel and white officers on November 1, 1869, at Fort McKavett, Texas; and

WHEREAS, the 24th Infantry Regiment served with distinction on the Western Frontier of the United States for the first 29 years of its illustrious existence. The unit was central in the defeat of the Comanche Native American group in northwestern Texas, clearing the territory for settlement by Americans; these heroic men also distinguished themselves in the defense of posts and the protection of roadways against bandits; and

WHEREAS, in 1898, the brave men of the 24th served with courage and valor in the U.S. Expeditionary Force in the Spanish-American War; at the climactic battle for San Juan Hill, they assaulted and seized the Spaniards' strategic blockhouse and trench system on the hill; and

WHEREAS, the importance of the capture of San Juan Hill in assuring the U.S. Army's victory in the Spanish-American War earned the 24th Infantry Regiment a special place in American history; the event has been memorialized in Delos Avery's regimental poem:

On July the first in Ninety-eight,
Up on a hill of hell thru hell's own gate
Marched—and made history that day
The Twenty-fourth Infantry, U.S.A.

Up from the reek of the river bed,
Up thru a storm of a Spaniard's lead,
Up from the death trap of Bloody Bend
Went the Twenty-fourth to the battle's end.

Up from the steaming muck and mire,
Cutting their path thru brush and wire.
Up they marched with a steady tread,
Leaving behind their maimed and dead.

Upward and over the open plain,
Shelterless under a leaden rain,
Upward with never a pause or rest
They stormed San Juan to its very crest.

That is the way they wrote their page
Of history—our heritage;
And that is why we salute today
The twenty-fourth infantry, U.S.A.; and

WHEREAS, the 24th subsequently played an instrumental role in the Philippine Insurrection (1899-1902), during which, on December 7, 1899, nine of these highly trained and combat seasoned warriors defeated 100 enemy guerrillas; and

WHEREAS, dispatched during the Punitive Expedition under General Pershing in 1916, the 24th entered Mexico to fight the forces of Pancho Villa and to prevent the Mexican Civil War from extending into U.S. territory; and

WHEREAS, the 24th Infantry Regiment was the first black infantry regiment sent overseas during World War II, arriving in the South Pacific in May of 1942; and

WHEREAS, securing airfields for the protection of incoming personnel and supplies and engaging the enemy in combat, the valiant men of the 24th were crucial to the success of various campaigns in the South Pacific, including Efate, Munda, Sasavele, Guadalcanal, and Bougainville; and

WHEREAS, the Regiment did battle with the remaining Japanese on the islands of Saipan and Okinawa during the latter days of World War II; at the end of the war, the 24th, under

the command of Colonel Julian G. Hear, Jr., took surrender of forces on Aka Shima Island, the first formal surrender of a Japanese Imperial Army Garrison; and

WHEREAS, after World War II, the 24th Infantry Regiment was assigned to the 25th Infantry Division for occupation duty in Japan at Okinawa and later Gifu, where it remained until the outbreak of hostilities in Korea in June of 1950; and

WHEREAS, during its meritorious service in Korea, the 24th was credited with the liberation of the first South Korean city from North Korean invasion forces after recapturing the city of Yechon on July 20, 1950; it fought throughout the entire Korean peninsula, from the defense of the Pusan Perimeter to the pursuit of communist forces deep into North Korea. The éclat with which these men performed their duties earned them the Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation; and

WHEREAS, the experiences that Lieutenant Colonel Charles Bussey endured as a part of Deuce Four in the Korean War, in which the last black combat unit of the United States fought alongside the last black 24th Infantry Regiment during the last and most important battle of the war, led him to write an extraordinary personal account, *Firefight at Yecho: Courage and Racism in the Korean War*; and

WHEREAS, the all-black 24th Infantry Regiment was dismantled and deactivated in Chipori, Korea on October 1, 1951, one month short of its 82nd anniversary; and

WHEREAS, this historic unit experienced a rebirth on August 24, 1995, when the 24th Infantry was once again activated; and

WHEREAS, its many duty locations throughout its honorable history include Fort McKavett, Texas, in 1869; Fort Douglas, Utah, in 1897; Santiago, De-Cuba, in 1898; the Philippines in 1899, Fort Ontario, New York, in 1908; the Mexican border in 1919; Fort Benning, Georgia, in 1922; Guadalcanal, New Hebrides, in 1942; the Marianas in 1944; Okinawa in 1945; IE-Shima in 1946; Camp Gifu, Japan, in 1947; Korea in 1950; Chipori, Korea, in 1951; Fort Lewis, Washington; and Iraq; and

WHEREAS, in its history, the Buffalo Soldiers of the 24th have won a total of twenty-three Medals of Honor, more than any other United States military unit; and

WHEREAS, this year, the unit will celebrate its 139th anniversary of proud and courageous service to this country; and

WHEREAS, during the celebration of the unit's anniversary, the 24th Infantry Regimental Combat Team Association will convene its 22nd annual reunion in Chattanooga, for which retired military artist Lieutenant Colonel Ernest E. Varner II will be the keynote speaker; and

WHEREAS, Ernest Varner's artwork provides the inspiration for the event's theme, "Miles to Go Before We Sleep"; and

WHEREAS, Lt. Col. Varner began his formal study of art at Riverside High School in Chattanooga, where he benefited from a strong art program that included portraiture classes in soft pastels, watercolors, and oils; he also studied painting and drawing at Chattanooga's Hunter Art Gallery, where he sold his first piece of artwork, "i"; and

WHEREAS, Lt. Col. Ernest Varner continued to study art at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC), and, recognizing his country's need for soldiers during the Vietnam War, he joined the Reserve Officers' Training Corps with the intention of serving in the Army and then returning to a position promised him at UTC; and

WHEREAS, in 1972, Lt. Col. Varner graduated with a major in psychology and a minor in art; he then joined the Army as a Medical Service Corps Officer. He left his initial plans to return to work at UTC by the wayside and continued serving until his retirement in 1994, earning the Legion of Merit for twenty-two years of dedicated service; and

WHEREAS, while on active duty, Lt. Col. Ernest Varner completed graduate courses in counseling at Boston University and earned a master's degree in general administration from Central Michigan University; following his retirement, he has enjoyed life in Acworth, Georgia, with his wife, Jacqueline; and

WHEREAS, Lt. Col. Varner's insightful address promises to be as inspiring as the Deuce Four Regimental Song:

Cheerful men with happy hearts,
Fearless, brave and true,
Loyal sons of liberty,
And the old Red, White, and Blue,
Side by side we march along
Onto Victory,
Singing as we march with pep

The Twenty-Fourth infantry

Hail! Hail! The Twenty-fourth
Men that do or die.
Hail! To the Twenty-fourth!
Watch as we pass by.
We are always ready (Semper Paratus)
We'll stand or fall
At our country's call,
The Twenty-fourth infantry. ; and

WHEREAS, the officers of the Association are President Norvel Harris, First Vice President Harry A. Davis, Second Vice President Charles Gregg, Third Vice President James Williams, Acting Treasurer Marva Matthews, Secretary James A. Burnett, Parliamentarian Robert L. Bruton, Jr., Chaplain Nathaniel Nicholson, Sergeant-at-Arms Curtis Womack, Presidential Aide Joseph Davis, Presidential Aide Tim Jones, and Auxiliary President Mary Brown; and

WHEREAS, the Association also benefits from the sagacious actions of its Board of Directors, which is comprised of Chairman Major General Oliver Dillard, Vice Chairman Major General Edward Greet, John S. Komp, Harry Woodruff, Clinton R. Moorman, Nathaniel Pipkins, and Robert L. Bruton, Jr.; and

WHEREAS, the Tennessee Chapter of the 24th Infantry Association consists of Chairperson Clyde A. Jones, Chairperson Leroy Smith, Curtis Lewis, William Prigmore, Walter Dowdy, Jr., reunion founder Joel Ward, and reunion coordinator Chrystal R. Jones; and

WHEREAS, these intrepid individuals have proven to be unwavering in their dedication to preserving the vast, rich history of the Buffalo Soldiers and to cultivating the 24th Infantry's annual reunion; and

WHEREAS, the 24th Infantry has woven its indelible, unbreakable threads into the tapestry of this Nation's history and is wholly deserving of our appreciation; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this Body join with the members of the 24th Infantry RCT and the 24th Infantry RCT Association in celebration of this momentous occasion; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE

CONCURRING, that we hereby join in the celebration of the 139th anniversary of the 24th Infantry Regimental Combat Team and the celebration of the unit's 22nd annual reunion, offering our best wishes for a fruitful and enjoyable experience for all who attend.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we encourage all citizens of Tennessee to reflect on the historically important role played by the Deuce Four, those intrepid Buffalo Soldiers, and we further extend our deepest gratitude for the many sacrifices made by the soldiers of the 24th Infantry throughout the years.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.